

Carmel Baker:

OPEN FOUNDATION: Australian History: Tuesday 2.00pm 4.00pm.

Regional History project: Nobby's Signal Station.
Pilot Steamer "Birubi".

Events in the History of Nobby's Signal Station.

Nobby's first sighted by Captain Cook in 1779, and called Hacking Island then Coal Island and eventually back to Nobby's which was the original name given by Captain Cook.

Coal was mined on the Island until 1817, then it was abandoned for fear the undermined sandstone would crash into the sea. In 1816, it was used as a refractory Prison by Captain Wallis for uncontrollable female convicts. Peter Sparks, Journalist with the Newcastle Morning Herald, found evidence that Francis Greenway planned the breakwater linking the Island with the mainland. He made sketches of the harbour and thought the Island had once been part of the mainland.

Governor Macquarie laid the foundation stone for the breakwater, in 181 and it was called Macquarie Pier. Convicts with overseers did the work and in 1822, it was found that £25,000 had been spent and only one third of the job had been done, so Governor Brisbane halted all work on the project.

It wasn't until 1833 that work was resumed as ships were using the entrance between Nobby's and the mainland and many were wrecked. In 1854, Colonel Barney devised a scheme to blow up Nobby's as it was thought to be a menace to shipping, but a residents action group led by Mr. John Bingle stopped all proceedings. A compromise was to cut 30 feet away from the top. Up until 1858, a coal fired beacon was lit on a small frame on Beacon Hill (Fort Scratchley) and this served mariners from 1828 until Nobby's Lighthouse was built and commenced service in 1858. The fire on Beacon Hill had been used continually since the settlement commenced in 1804.

The new Lighthouse on Nobby's was completed in 1858 to a design from the office of the Colonial Architect Alexander Dawson. It belongs to a period of feverish activity in Australian maritime history. It witnessed the beginning of coal export, steam driven vessels on the Australian coast and dramatic events

on the desperate struggle of small sailing craft for economic survival.

The gold rush in California in the 1840s, saw a boom in Newcastle, as it was cheaper for the Californians to sail to Newcastle for coal than to sail around Cape Horn, so at that time Newcastle grew from a penal out-station to one of the most important cities in the world. It is recorded that in 1883, 45 vessels left the port in the space of three hours, and after the strike of 1896, 100 windjammers were waiting for coal. (1)

The first Signalmaster was Jesse Hannel, a father of 13, who worked 16 hours a day for £250 a year. The light was produced by China tea oil and kerosene was considered too dangerous. He retired in 1888.

The light was converted to electricity in 1935, and the old lightkeepers quarters demolished. The Lighthouse is noted (2) to be the earliest surviving example on the N.S.W. coast of the series of maritime lights installed in conformity with Trinity House codes.

During the Depression in the 1930s, homeless workers were housed at the foot of Nobby's in makeshift camp. The camp grew until there were many families living there and it became known as Nobby's camp. Constant agitation from the ratepayers of the district failed to dislodge these people, until 1937, when the Federal Government decided they wanted the area for a parade ground, so the camp ended and the majority of the people ended up at "Platts Estate." (3)

(1) T.Callen. "Bar Dangerous" Newcastle. 1986. (53)

(2) N.S.W Lighthouses, Report to the Royal Society of N.S.W. Dec.1898. article W.G.Goold. Port of Sydney. Volume I. M.S.Board.

(3)S.Gay Newcastle in the Great Depression. N.C.C. 1984.

Regional History Project: Nobby's Signal Station from the period 1930 till 1945.

With the commencement of World War II, Naval authorities established a Port War Signal Station at Nobby's. The White Ensign was hoisted at 8.0am on the 12th September, 1939 and Maritime Services Board Signalmen joined with Naval Reserve Signalmen in manning Nobby's. Open Morse signalling was discontinued and all signalling was done by Navy men using an Aldis light, day and night. By the 15th September, the Naval Signalmen had moved into No.3 Cottage, Nobby's, which was also used as a wireless station.

As early as April, 1939, Nobby's had received instructions that shipping information was to be given only to the boatmen and tugs. Naval Control or Maritime Services Board devised a system of screening all information before it reached Nobby's and all vessels from overseas, including New Zealand ~~must~~ ^{had to} report to the Pilot Station when entering Port so they ~~can~~ ^{could} inform Pass Port Guard.

The "Birubi" had been made an examination vessel and all vessels approaching the Port had to be examined by the "Birubi" before entering the Port. After the 4th December 193, Fort Scratchley battery had to be informed between sunset to sunrise the movements of all ships, either day or night.

The most surprising snippet was the Civilian Police's role in patrolling Nobby's. They were sent on the 12th September, 1939 and working in eight hour shifts, patrolled along the breakwater and around Nobby's Signal Station, but this only went on till the 3rd October, 1939.

Ten days later, regulations stated that one-way traffic was to be enforced, and vessels approaching the entrance had to wait outside until the outward bound vessel had cleared the entrance. The channel had never been deep enough or wide enough to have two way traffic, and this instruction must have had a reason. The next day it was decided that when the Port closed Signal was displayed by day or night, no tide signals were to be exhibited.

By the 25th September, instructions were received from the Commonwealth Meteorological Bureau that all weather information to the Air Force Stations throughout the Commonwealth were to be sent in code and Nobby's received special code books giving information as to how advice should be sent.

Instructions were received on the 18th December, 1940 to switch off the Lighthouse light for that night only.

The tanker "British Confidence" while berthed at the Inflammable Liquid Wharf at 1.50pm on the 15th December, 1939, had to be cast off and taken to sea, anchoring in Stockton Bight owing to a heavy explosion which blew the top of the tank off, killing an Oil Company's Engineer and setting the contents of the tank on fire. The fire extinguished by foam fire fighting plants and the tanker resumed discharging next morning. The "William McArthur" had to be towed in to port on the 10th August as it was 'making little water aft. Rudder not safe', and on the 12th Feb. 1941, the "Carlisle" had a fire in the hold, but the fire was put out by her crew.

On the 13th February, 1941, Fort Scratchley battery opened fire on the "Ulooloo", at 8.45pm. The "Ulooloo" had been ordered to stop at 8.40pm, and to go back over the line to be examined by the "Birubi" which finally happened at 9.20pm. The Master finally signalled that the searchlights were dazzling him. These were attended to.

On the 16th October, 1941, the Fort Scratchley battery again opened fire, this time it was the "Bonalbo". The "Bonalbo" would not stop for the "Birubi" to examine and came over the dead line, so a shot was fired across her bow. She eventually entered.

On the 12th December, 1941, instructions were received that flags denoting British, Foreign and Coastal ships were not to be shown from the Signal Station until further orders.

There was reorganization of the personnel at Nobby's in February 1941, the Naval Signalmen were transferred back to Fort Scratchl and Ratings were left at Nobby's to attend to the logging of ships hoisting proceed and channel signals; they finally all left in March and the Port War Signal Station was established at Shepherd's Hill, but they didn't leave the quarters at Nobby's t.

Here was
By August/a/complete change of command at Nobby's when the Military moved in and occupied No.3 Cottage, but by October, the following year, they had to move as a building contractor, F.Pickles, started demolishing the old cottages and commenced building new ones. Automatic telephones wereⁿt installed until March 1941.

The S.S."Allara" was torpedoed in the early hours of the morning of the 23rd July 1942 by a submarine 20 miles off Newcastle, killing 5 and injuring 10 people. The Tugs "Heroic" and "St.Hilary" towed "Allara" into Port at 6.00am on the 24th Ju The "Allara" had part of her stern blown off and was berthed at Lee Wharf.

Newcastle was fired on by a submarine on the 6th June, 1942. 2.17: It was about 3 miles north east of Nobby's and one shell landed on the corner of No.1 house, which was still under construction. The walls were only about 7 feet high at the time, but the shell did not explode. Several other shots were fired, some landing at the Steel Works, Parnell Place and Rylands Wire Works. The shell that landed on the roadway in Parnell Place shattered a few windows etc. but most of the shells fired did not explode. The submarine also fired flares and Varey lights which lighted up the town. The last shot was fired at 2.40am. At 3.00am the lighthouse was blacked-out, and also all tide signals.

The "Davenport" caught fire while undergoing repairs at her berth about No.7 Dyke in October, 1943 and after all efforts to put the fire out had failed, she was towed away by the tug "Champion" outside the heads where she burnt to the water and sank, and on the 26th December, the same year, two U.S.A. Small Craft went on the beach in Stockton Bight late at night. The same year, the "Kotor" went ashore on the Northern breakwater and the tugs "Heroic" and "St.Hilary" towed her off and eventually towed her to Lee Wharf.

On the 31st July 1943, "Birubi" ended her career as an examination steamer, and the following May, Nobby's was issued with its own Aldis signalling lamp by the Maritime Services Board.

By August 1944, British, Foreign and Coastal flags were once again flown at Nobby's, the same as pre-war days.

1945,
In January, the A.W.A.S. moved out of Nos. 2 and 3 cottages, and the Military Garrison Guard was moved out of No.1 cottage, their Radar ^{was} dismantled and taken away, and finally on the 25th January, the Military handed back to the Maritime Services Board, the cottages.

These facts and figures were recorded at Nobby's Signal Station by the Signal Master on the 28th November, 1945 and presented to the Harbour Master as a history of the Board's war activities at Nobby's during war period of World War II.

Bibliography:

Callen T., Bar Dangerous" Newcastle 1986.

Goold. W.G. N.S.W. Lighthouses, Report to the Royal Society
of N.S.W. Dec.1898. Volume I. M.S.B.

Gray S. Newcastle in the Great Depression. Newcastle. 1984.

Nobby's Signal Station; History of the Board's War Activities,
Newcastle. Activities at Nobby's during war period of War

Brief Summary of the "pilot vessel "Birubi". 1927-1959.

The first Pilot in Newcastle harbour on record was William Eckford in 1812, with a convict in a small whaleboat 20 feet long. The crew rowed him out to any ship needing his services.

In 1848, the first Newcastle built life boat came into service, but after the disastrous wreck of the "Cawarra" in 1866, the volunteer system of manning the life boat was abolished by the Government. A system was then introduced in which the Pilot boatmen for an additional £1 per month in wages, kept the boat manned and ready for any emergencies and rescue operations.

By 1875, Newcastle residents, appalled at the number of rescue operations the Pilot Boat was required to do, plus the growing number of wrecks and lost lives, pressured the Government for a steam vessel to be used for rescue and towing duties.

The "Ajax" was finally supplied in the early 1880s and had a spectacular career rescuing sailing ships. After 30 years it was stripped and run aground on Walsh Island to be replaced by the "Birubi" in 1927. The "Birubi" which is the Aboriginal word for "Southern cross" was 144 feet long, coal fed and on her speed trials reached 12 knots. Her career was not as hectic as the "Ajax" but performed some famous rescue operations. In the Uralla gale of 1928, it searched for survivors of the "White Bay" which was wrecked on Stockton Beach, and in 1931, it was sent on a mercy dash to Lord Howe Island to take a doctor and nurse to a woman seriously ill and in 1934 rescued passengers from ferry "Bluebell" which was rammed by a 60-miler the "Warranene". Three lives were lost in this incident. In 1935, the crew of the small trading vessel the San Toy which went aground on Big Ben rocks off Nobby's beach were rescued.

On the 3rd December 1939 at the outbreak of world war II, the Pilot Steamer "Birubi" commenced duties as an examination vessel.

The duty of the examination steamer was to pass and give all vessels entering the Port a clearance. When a vessel was sighted at Nobby's a flag was flown on the Northern yard of the Northern flag pole denoting whether she was a British or a Foreign ship and on the Southern yard arm a flag was flown to denote a coastal ship. When any of these ships were within four or five miles of the Port, the proceed was hoisted at Nobby's on the Northern flag pole and a record was kept, giving the time when the ship was sighted and the direction she was coming from, also when the proceed was given and the time the examination steamer left her moorings or wharf, wherever she might be.

A record was also kept when the examination vessel passed and gave the approaching vessel her clearance. Times and bearings were also kept. When the approaching vessel hoisted the clearance flags or lights, these were checked at Nobby's.

On the 3rd of September, 1939, instructions were given that on the approach to the Port of any vessel, the "Birubi" has to be given her name while at the buoy and proceed given so that the "Birubi" can examine her.

On the 16th October, the "Bonalbo" would not stop as directed and came over the dead line and Fort Scratchley battery opened fire across her bow. She eventually entered.

On the 31st July 1943, the "Birubi" finished her career as an examination steamer.

The "Birubi" was an expensive vessel to run and on the 7th August 1959 after 32 years of service it was paid off. It had been manned by three separate crews and 6 pilots and was kept ready at all times and in all conditions.

The end of the "Birubi" meant the end of rowing the Pilot to the incoming ships. It had been built at Walsh Island Dockyard in 1927 and ended its life in the shipbreakers yard. The paying off pennant was 176 feet long. The Ships bell is kept at the Pilot station.

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

1988

I, Bernie Baker give my
permission to Carmel Baker

to use this interview, or part of this interview, for
research, publication and/or broadcasting (delete one of
these if required) and for copies to be lodged in
the Newcastle University

.....
for the use of other bona fide researchers.

Signed Bernie Baker

Date 14.9.88

Interviewer C. Baker

Summary of interview:

This was an interview of Barrie Baker, a man born and bred fifty-five years ago in Cook's Hill, who was witness to a series of events in the development of Newcastle.

His first job was with a major shipping company in Newcastle, Howard Smith, followed by service in the Royal Australian Navy. He worked as a labourer in the Bloom Mill of the B.H.P, then 12 months on the "Pilot Steamer Birubi", which ended its service of 32 years in Newcastle and brought a new era of Pilot vessels to the Port. He lived and worked at Port Kembla at the beginning of the influx of the huge migrant population which poured into Wollongong in the 1960s and resulted in a boom time there, and returned to Newcastle to work and live at Nobby's Signal Station, which is now operated with highly sophisticated technology.

Transcript of interview with B.H.Baker, Signalman Nobby's
Signal Station. 14.9.1988.

To start off really would be a part of the general education arrangements of Cook's Hill. I went to Cook's Hill School. Kindergarden, infants, primary and high school, so I was at the same school from the age of five until fourteen. After I left school at fourteen, I got a job as a junior clerk in a shipping office. Howard Smith Ltd., This was a rather large shipping company with a fleet of ships that plied the Australian coast. The ships were named after time periods. There was a ship called the "Age",there was a ship called the Howard Smith... the "Caldare" which was a 60-miler which used to carry coal from Newcastle to Sydney for the Bunnerong Power Station.

As a Junior Clerk there, there were sloping desks and stools like something out of Charles Dickens. There was a typing pool where all the typists worked frantically. A comptotrist room where everybody had adding machines where you put down the numbers and pulled the levers. There was also a switchboard, where instead of dialing the numbers, you transferred them all with plugs in different sockets, and one of the jobs of the Junior Clerk was to operate the switch board while the switchboard girl was at lunch. The Manager's Office was in a glass enclosure and the Assistant Manager he also had a room enclosed in glass, but we were all supervised by the Accountant, who was put in a position where he could see everybody.

My job was the stamp book, putting stamps on letters and carefully writing out who the letters went to. I also used to go to a place called Tyrrell House to pick up the loading chits record that showed the numbers of the coal wagons that went in the ships. These were checked alongside the waybill or the Weighbridge at Telarah that weighed the coal wagons as they came down. Anyhow, after there at 18, I joined the Navy.

I think I spent about six months at Flinders Naval Depot trained to be a Signaller and if I remember correctly I went to a ship called H.M.A.S. "Murchison" which was a River class frigate. This was at the time of the Korea war and the Japanese, or rather Chinese Communist Party taking over China. On the Murchison, there was great tales of the battle of the Han River, and recently I saw on a TV show about Korea, how, the 'River Murchison' moved up this river called the Han in Korea and did a mad dash up the river to rescue people, although I was'nt on the "Murchison" at the time.

From the "Murchison" I was transferred to the flagship which was the H.M.A.S. "Australia". This was a three funnel cruiser which had all the appearance of the glory of the Navy, with 8 inch guns fore and aft. Later I was transferred then to the "River Shoalhaven" or H.M.A.S. "Shoalhaven" and from there the "Shoalhaven" tour of duty included Korea. Our first port after leaving Sydney was Hong Kong and at Hong Kong it was announced the armistice was signed at Korea and we were to proceed to Korea to carry out the Armistice Committee Truce surveillance. This meant anchoring at the 38th parallel and checking that there were no incursions on either side. This was in the depth of winter with icebergs floating around. We had to use steam hoses to keep the ice off the ships, and while we were up there, one incident, I can remember was as part of the United Nations we had to recognise codes and if a ship came up and didn't answer his recognition code for the day and the hour, he was considered hostile.

I was on the bridge at the time when this unidentified ship came up. I challenged him with the signalling lamp and no reply came back. I then gave another signal to him to say that if he did not reply, we would open fire. Frantically on the radio came this American voice saying "don't fire, I can't find the book with the correct signal."

From Korea, we used to go back to Japan to a Port called Kure and I remember going on a train trip to Hiroshima and I have a picture of myself and my shipmates alongisde, I think it was the Town Hall, where the bomb actually was dropped.

Japan at the time was making a lot of money out of selling souvenirs and I bought back some things. One of the things I brought back was a geisha doll in a little box with four wigs. All these wigs represented different things, or the different characters of the geisha girl. I enquired of my mother what happened to it and said the moths got to the wigs so they thre everthing out.

After Korea, I came back to Australia - it was the time of the Monte Bello atomic tests, and we went around to Monte Bello where the exercise was that a ship had a atomic bomb and it smuggled itself into a port with the idea of exploding and we were there to measure or moniter the explosion. We were about five miles from the test site and of course, the bomb went off and we sat there and watched the cloud. I remember the cloud, it was'nt a mushroom cloud, it looked a bit like a koala bear sitting on a tree limb. After that I can remember being around in Western Australia and the fishermen were catthing lobsters, and we used to buy for the ship a couple of cornbags full of lobsters and sit there and eat these lobsters, which the fishermen were selling at a rediculous price of something like five cents a lobster. They were only small ones, we used to call them cray birds. I came back to Sydney and I went to "Kuttabul" and worked on the signal station. That was a Signal Station right at the end of Garden Island and it controlled the Naval Ships. That was rather good there, also I was on a boom defence boat the "Kanimbla" and we went a1l around Australia on that one, checking the mooring buoys for the ships in the harbours, and after that I paid off in the Navy in 1957. I had been married in the January I think it was, I left the Navy in about July and got a job as a Clerk at the B.H.P.

The money was so poor, and everybody who was working shiftwork at the B.H.P. was making more money, so I transferred and became a greaser in the Bloom mill. This Bloom mill was the place that they rolled red hot steel into different shapes like railway lines and RSJ beams. I worked there for about 12 months and there was a job coming up at the Maritime Services Board as a relief seaman on the "Birubi". I spent about 12 months on the "Birubi" and when you are a new starter you get all the rotten jobs, and my job each morning when we did our shift and that was 24 hour shifts on and 48 hours off. There used to be a bakehouse near Newcastle Hospital and we used to go up there to get the bread and it was tied in newspaper with a piece of string around it. Also I went to the butcher shop, got the meat, got the newspapers and the milk and took them back to the "Birubi". Normally the "Birubi" used to lay at a buoy, now there is a buoy off the dockyard and its called the "Birubi" buoy and that is how it got its name from the "Birubi".

We used to lay at the buoy and as a ship came down the steelworks channel, if it had a pilot on board, we would slip from the buoy and slowly follow the outward ship. There used to be two types of jobs, inside the harbour and outside. The inside jobs were the easiest, because you just dropped the seaboard and rowed over alongside the ship on its way out, the pilot came down the ladder and joined the "Birubi", but if there was an outward ship, it went right out to sea and the chances are we used to have to row a long way to it. When we used to have an inward ship, you'd go to the inward ship rowing all the time for about 1,000 yards, and they used to have a boat rope running from fore to aft on the ships. Now the ships at the time were riveted hulls, so all the hulls planks overlapped each other and you had to be careful when you went alongside the ship that the gunnel of the boarding boat didn't get caught in the lapping part of the rivets of the plates of the ships.

We used to have to grab hold of the boat rope to hold the boarding boat alongside the ship while the pilot embarked or disembarked. If you missed the boat rope, you inevitably drifted down aft, and down aft was the sewerage discharge of the ship and the engine discharge and also the propeller that was out of the water, so if you didn't hold the rope you drifted down aft, you got all the ship's discharge all over you and chances of hitting the propeller.

The Pilots used to rule the roost in those days, you'd be at the buoy on board the "Birubi" and the pilots used to come in these launches, one was called the "Ajax" and the "Pindara" and another the "Garraway". In those days, they were all spit and polish. Clean and the brass was shining and the job when the launch came out was to put the pilot on board, you had to go down from the bridge to the aft rail and open a gate, hold out 2 Man ropes so that the pilot could climb aboard. One night I was on and the launch came out and normal procedure was to leave the gate open so the pilot could just come aboard without worrying anybody, but we had a pilot called Captain Chapman senior. His son is now a pilot, and Captain Chapman would[^]nt get off the launch unless there was someone there standing at the gate to walk him on board. Anyhow, he gave me a lecture about the need to be down at the gate while someone was coming on board.

I got back at him, because when we went out the "Birubi" as we lowered the seaboat, you were supposed to put the plug and the pilot was standing in the boat, and when the boat hit the water, this is the boarding boat, the plug not being in the boat, the water shot up and wet all the pilot's clothes, so we had to row him out to a ship and he was sopping wet.

Anyhow, the "Birubi" finished up in about 1958 - or 59.

and I then got a job at the Pilot Station and in those days we had to paint all the beacons, do the moorings up the harbour, go up as far as Hexham to paint the beacons and one time while we were painting the beacons in Newcastle Harbour, down near the Ferry Wharf, where there were two main beacons near what they call the lead lights, we painted the beacons and everybody used to park their cars underneath and we splattered all the cars with paint.

The Officer-in-charge of the boat-dock was the nearest thing that you could get to someone superior to you and he used to have us whitewashing all the area of the boatdock.

It was really like being back in the Navy again. Anyhow, there was a job at Port Kembla and I transferred down there with the family for approximately ten years. The Signal Station was isolated and we paid eighty cents a week for the accommodation with free electricity. The Signal Station at Port Kembla in 1958 was an old Army observation Tower. There were no fences around it and you had to drive along a dirt road to get to it. People still lived in what we would call old shacks along the beach which were at the back of a place called "Metal Manufacturers. The signalling equipment at Port Kembla was pretty primitive, with the old signalling lamp and no radios. This went on for quite some time, even the ships in the port, some of the berths didn't have radios or telephones, so we had to receive and pass messages to them by light.

Port Kembla there was called Five Islands and outside there were five Islands. Everybody always talked about the Islands off Port Kembla. We used to go up to Bowral quite often for the Tulip festival, picking blackberries and rabbiting with some of the blokes on the wharves. Anyhow, Port Kembla was pretty good and we finally went back to Newcastle.

I remember that when we were down there, we didn't have shift rates for shift work and in 1961, when we bought our first car which was a Volkswagon, the cost of the Volkswagon was £991 and my total wages for the year was £997.

Up at Nobby's there, it was still much the same, still no radios, just the signalling lamps and eventually things changed and they brought in marine VHF radios, but still the signalling lamp, and it was just at the end of the era of the 60-milers when the ships used to come from Sydney to load coal and to go back to Sydney again.

It was interesting, the ships used to load between about 450 tons and 600 ton of coal in those days in the 60-milers, today we have ships going overseas with about 17,000 ton of coal. Nobby's Signal Station, we still send the weather up there and we are in the 125th year. We are expected to know everything about the weather and one of the terms I use if anybody wants to go fishing the next day, is to say it could be the same as today, but could change. It makes everybody happy.

Nobby's has had disasters. While I was there, the drilling barge blew up, we've had the gale which they call the "Signa" gale, after the name of the ship that went aground, we were living there at the time. All the telephones, roads, everything was cut because this was an easterly gale, with winds 110K an hour, 150 miles or 110 knots I think it was. We used to have a few things happen up there, yachts going aground, we've had people drown and ships coming in the entrance and missing their bearing and ending up on the breakwater.

Nobby's seems to be something that people always want to know something, what winds are blowing so that they can go fishing

tomorrow. People who live up at Muswellbrook and Scone ring up wanting to know if its suitable to go fishing. Everybody thinks we know everything and we can help them out. Also looking across from Nobby's you can see the wreck of the "Addph". A four masted sailing bacque that went aground in 1904.

When you're there and you get visitors, they are always intrigued when they look around and everybody says what a wonderful place to live there and do you ever get bored with the job,you did become part of Newcastle with the radio stations and the TV and newspapers, right now we've introduced aquatic air service three times a day from Sydney to Newcastle.

They have a base in Newcastle - a girl operated at the base and she calle "Nobby's Signal Station, Aquatic air, we have a plane landing in three minutes, - Nobby's Signal Station - this is aquatic air, we have a plane taking off." It makes you feel quite important, and then of course the Air Force do all their exercises out in the Bight, the helicopters drop smoke flares.

People ring us up saying "Oh I think there's something on fire out there."

Its amazing what people see and what they don't. Sometimes a yacht might be in distress and fires flares and nobody sees it, and another time people say "We think we saw a red flare out there," and sometimes when Mars shines very brightly they say theres a plane out there and it requires assistance. Like I said, it does become a focal point for all of Newcastle. We used to get the fire brigades come up quite a bit.

Somone used to send hoax calls and they would get a call saying there is a fire at Nobby's and they used to race up here now and then. Sometimes the Police come up just for a look. Everybody likes to come up and have a look at Nobby's and see whats going on.